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## Europe's Past — And Future

By [The Globalist](#) | Friday, July 23, 2004

Europe has come a long way in terms of development and unification — and yet, it still has a long road to travel. Following the May 2004 enlargement, an intense debate is now underway about the future direction of the EU — including how deeply and broadly it will be integrated. Frits Bolkestein — the European Commissioner for Internal Market, Taxation and Customs Union issues — weighs in on this debate.

### Looking at the big picture, how successful has the EU been over the past few decades?

"If judged by the span of a single human life, European integration has been one of the success stories of the second half of the 20th century. For anyone who remembers the Second World War, the turnaround in the fortunes of Europe is nothing short of dramatic."

**"Above all, France provided the core ideas for the European project, relying on the Germans for money — and on the Italians for the necessary flexibility."**

### What were the original goals of the EU founders?

"The main aims of the Founding Fathers of the European Community in the 1950s were threefold: To prevent a new war between France and Germany, to offer resistance to the threat of Soviet Russia — and to rebuild the European economy."

### And have they all been met?

"Fifty years on, all these goals have been achieved. France and Germany are still the main driving force behind the European ideal, the Soviet Union has

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been dismantled — and Europe is a world force in the fields of economy and trade.”

## **Why were Germany — and especially France — so important in this process?**

“In the past, France had given shape both to European integration and to European institutions. The European administration was given a French ‘soul’. Above all, France provided the core ideas for the European project, relying on the Germans for money — and on the Italians for the necessary flexibility.”

## **What is Europe’s greatest strength — and where is it still weak?**

“Economically, Europe is a world power. Militarily and politically, Europe is a regional power. In matters relating to trade, investment and economic relations, Europe has the right to demand that its voice should be heard. This is one of the European Union’s strongest cards and the most noticeable success to date of the politics of integration.”

## **What is one of the drawbacks of EU enlargement?**

“The European decision-making process loses its effectiveness in direct proportion to the number of countries sitting at the negotiating table. The larger the group, the fewer the decisions it can make.”

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**“The European project continues to expand because there is no ordered mechanism for limiting its scope. It is precisely this that threatens to make the European Union unmanageable.”**

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## **Will there ever be a United States of Europe?**

“The European Union can never become a federation in which each of the member countries is allocated the role of a member state of the American Union.”

## **But shouldn’t that be the ultimate goal of European integration?**

“Many of those currently working in European institutions see this kind of federalism as the highest ideal: the way to the Promised Land. This gives their federalist arguments an almost missionary character. In reality, however, a European federation of 25 or more disparate nations is a myth.”

## **In that light, how do you view the chances of implementing a common EU foreign policy?**

"In theory, a common foreign policy could offer enormous benefits of scale. In practice, the EU is only able to reap such benefits in the field of international trade. We should be under no illusions with regard to a foreign policy. The views and interests of the larger member states are too divergent to make such a policy possible — at least in the short term."

### How much larger will the EU get?

"The European project continues to expand because there is no ordered mechanism for limiting its scope. We are doing more — and we are getting larger. It is precisely this combination that threatens to make the European Union unmanageable."

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### What about expanding the EU even further to the east?

"The current enlargement of the Union eastwards is an historic and a moral obligation. At the same time, it is also slightly frightening. Because of our feelings of guilt, promises have been made to several of the countries next in line: Belarus and Ukraine. On his own initiative, Silvio Berlusconi has

tried to win favor with President Putin of Russia by promising him EU membership. This is unwise."

### Why?

"We should not feel ashamed to recognize that borders exist. The European Union should not raise expectations, which it has no desire to fulfill. Foreign policy is not a matter of being nice to others. It is a matter of securing one's own interests."

### Finally, how do you feel about an EU industrial policy?

"There is no need to promote 'national champions' as proposed by France and Germany. Interventionist industrial policies do not work because bureaucrats and politicians cannot second-guess the market. They tend to pick losers, not winners."

*Adapted from Commissioner Bolkestein's speech at the Clingendael Tepsa Conference at The Hague on June 25, 2004. For the full text of his remarks, please click [here](#).*

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